

I believe that environmental protection and economic prosperity need not be mutually-exclusive goals. A clean and healthy environment is critically important, and with sustained economic prosperity comes enhanced environmental protection. But in some cases the implementation of our nation's environmental laws has moved beyond this goal and has begun to risk public health and safety, strain rural economies, and infringe upon private property rights. In addition, at least one of these laws - the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973 - has achieved a mere 1 percent success rate. 99 percent of species on the ESA list have not recovered to healthy populations. I believe we can and must strike a better balance. I've supported legislation to improve this outdated law to encourage more accurate scientific decision-making and to re-establish recovery as a central goal of the ESA.

Too often we've seen instances in Northern California where the ESA has been implemented in a way that simply defies commonsense and in some cases has put community health and safety at risk. In 1991, the Corps of Engineers issued a report identifying levee sections that protect the community of Arboga, just south of Marysville, as needing immediate repair. Their analysis included a sober assessment that without repair this levee section could fail, and that such a failure would likely result in, "a loss of human life." Tragically, local efforts to repair the levee were bogged down by ESA regulations for nearly seven years. The catastrophic flood of January 1997 broke through the weakened levee - just as the Corps had predicted - and three lives and hundreds of millions of dollars in property and infrastructure were lost.

In 2001, over 1,200 small farm and ranch families in Northern California's Klamath Basin were devastated when federal biologists ruled that the ESA required the federal government to withhold 100 percent of irrigation water from this farming community in order to protect three species of fish.

The federal ESA still does not provide the needed flexibility to properly balance the needs of people and species. I do not believe Congress envisioned these kinds of tragic results when it passed the ESA some 35 years ago. I support commonsense reforms to this law and many of our other environmental laws to ensure they are implemented in a more balanced way, and that they respect the needs of people along with the environment.

[[go back to "On the Issues" main page](#)]